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ABSTRACT

A Single Team Bargaining (STB) approach was used to reduce the complications in labor/management relations resulting from the merger of the British Columbia Institute of Technology and the Pacific Vocational Institute. Traditionally, collective bargaining is a conflict-oriented process, in which the parties represent different constituents, are governed by often incongruent responsibilities and demands, and must compete for limited resources. STB, on the other hand, is a collective process in which parties view the success of the organization as a common goal in their search for solutions that are acceptable to both labor and management. In the STB process, there is no one spokesperson, discussions are off the record, all ideas are examined carefully, more than one solution is documented, constraints are declared, extensive research may be required, there is no game playing, and caucuses are deemed unnecessary. The Institute has successfully reached three collective bargaining agreements using STB and has found that the focus of the negotiations is on real problems, not symptoms, that parties are prevented from digging in behind unilateral solutions, and that management and the union have both reacted positively. Though the process has advantages, STB will not work without trust and commitment. (AJL)

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SINGLE TEAM BARGAINING

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

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June 1988

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SINGLE TEAM BARGAINING
(An Alternative Approach to Collective Bargaining)

In May of 1985, the Government of the Province of British Columbia announced the merger of two major institutes of training, The British Columbia Institute of Technology and The Pacific Vocational Institute.

The outcome was the creation of a new British Columbia Institute of Technology with a provincial mandate for the delivery of training in Engineering, Business, Health and the Trades.

As might be expected, this merger placed many stresses and demands on the new organization. There was a need to restructure and adapt to changed directions, operating requirements and interpersonal relationships.

Each of the former Institutes had its own instructional and support staff unions. The new, consolidated Institute required the merging of the two support unions while retaining the two separate technology and trades instructional unions.

As an additional complication, labour relations at the two Institutes had been far from satisfactory over the

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preceding years and had been particularly aggravated by a lengthy period of restraint and significant overhaul of labour relations legislation by the Province.

On examining this potentially highly charged environment, the Institute, through its new President, Roy Murray, felt that there was a need to develop new approaches to deal with its union/management relations.

In consideration of these factors, the concept of Single Team Bargaining was introduced to the Institute in January 1986 by Tom Crossman, of Crossman Associates International, at the President's request.

In order to effectively overview the Single Team Bargaining approach for you, I would first like to paint a scenario of traditional bargaining in its baser form.

Collective bargaining is ostensibly a conflict oriented process, where the parties represent different constituencies of interest, compete for limited resources, and are governed by responsibilities and demands that may not be congruent.

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In addition, there are climate and process reasons why collective bargaining has a potential for conflict. Examine the following:

- The parties develop a mandate that normally has the approval of their respective board/membership

- The parties appoint chief negotiators, whose job it is to get the best deal possible for their bosses.

- The parties present to each other unilateral proposals and demands, some of which represent real concerns, others that may be used to conceal true positions or to serve as trade-offs.

- The physical environment is formal, with opposing tables separating the parties, a definite order as to the players sit, and the availability of caucus rooms for each party to meet in private.

- It is a win/lose process.

- Power is the major determinant of the acceptable outcome.

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Traditional bargaining -- or as it is often called, "Positional Bargaining" -- can often degenerate into a games playing process, with the parties engaging in disinformation, employee/member propagandizing and straight-out legal tactics such as slow downs, strikes and lockouts.

By comparison, Single Team Bargaining is a collective process that enjoins the parties to view the success and survival of the organization as a common goal.

In Single Team Bargaining, both the union and the employer commit to work jointly to identify and solve each other's problems and concerns. Preconceived positions are not established, and demands are not made; instead, the focus is on a search for ideas and views that will offer solutions acceptable to both parties.

An informal atmosphere is encouraged and brainstorming strategies and techniques are applied. Much of the discussion is "off the record"; this encourages a more effective search for solutions in which all members of the committee may participate freely.

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A spirit of mutual trust and cooperation is developed and adversarialism is reduced or eliminated. The emphasis is on what is right, not who is right.

It is a system of bargaining by which hostility and conflict often evident in union/management relations are reduced. It encourages the development of a mature and responsible interpersonal relationship that can carry over into post-bargaining contract administration and organizational employee/administrator cooperation.

STB

LETS LOOK NOW AT THE STB PROCESS IN GREATER DEPTH:

- COMBINATION OF RESOURCES (UNION/EMPLOYER) TO SOLVE PROBLEMS
- NO ONE SPOKESPERSON
- ANYONE ON THE TEAM CAN SPEAK AT ANY TIME
- DISCUSSIONS ARE OFF THE RECORD
- ALL IDEAS CAREFULLY EXAMINED
- SOLUTIONS -- OFTEN MORE THAN ONE ARE DOCUMENTED AT APPROPRIATE TIMES
- CONSTRAINTS DECLARED
- OPEN DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION
- EXTENSIVE RESEARCH MAY BE REQUIRED
- NO SURPRISES, NO GAMES PLAYING
- CAUCUS' UNNECESSARY OR MINIMIZED

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

- An organization should always take steps to keep its employees and unions informed of and involved in all organizational issues.

- Proposals and demands should be recognized as someone's unilateral solution.

- The parties should expect that a full identification and discussion of issues, problems and concerns will lead to mutually satisfactory solutions.

- Fighting and arguing are destructive activities that may impede constructive progress in bargaining and negatively impact upon subsequent day-to-day relationships.

EXPERIENCES AND SUCCESSES

The Institute has successfully concluded three collective agreements using Single Team Bargaining and is currently in bargaining with one of its instructional unions for the second time using this approach.

There are as well other examples of the same or similar approaches that have met with varying degrees of success:

- Principled Bargaining
  Alcan, Arvida, Quebec

- Agreement Revision Process
  Cariboo College, Kamloops, B.C.

- Getting to Yes
  The Province of British Columbia

STB ADVANTAGES

Single Team Bargaining can be an effective mechanism to foster and facilitate a positive and constructive bargaining relationship.

- The focus is on real problems, not just symptoms.
- It prevents parties from becoming "dug in" unilateral solutions.
- Management is more cooperative if union demands are identified as concerns.
- The union reacts positively if management is concerned about employee and union issues.
- Hostility and frustration are replaced by teamwork and mutual respect.
- The team is instrumental in shaping solutions and are thus more committed to making them work.
- Potential for identifying the best solution is greatly enhanced.

- Success in achieving good results instills pride and confidence in the participants.

- The level of trust increases.

- Single team problem solving spills over into day-to-day relationships.

- The process can work within the context of existing legislative systems.

- It is hard work but produces better settlements for all parties concerned.

LIMITATIONS

Single Team Bargaining will not work where:

- One or the other party is not committed to the process.
- There is a lack of trust.
- There are hidden political objectives and agendas.
- Key individuals set about to obstruct the process.

Single Team Bargaining requires a high level of interpersonal skills.

Traditional negotiators find it difficult to be open and candid.

Many find it difficult not to know the outcome in advance.

Single Team Bargaining works best if everyone is equally determined to make it work.

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SINGLE TEAM BARGAINING CONCLUSIONS

Single Team Bargaining is a viable alternative to traditional bargaining.

The process can facilitate a win/win outcome.

It squares with much of behavioral science.

It is a sensible approach.

It contributes to an overall positive organizational employee relations climate.

It is really a system of organizational management and professional behavior.

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EVALUATION OF OUR EXPERIENCE WITH SINGLE TEAM BARGAINING

- SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME
- REQUIRES A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY
- PROCESS EMOTIONALLY DRAINING FOR THE PLAYERS
- BETTER DEAL FOR ALL PARTIES
- CONTRIBUTES TO A POSITIVE EMPLOYEE RELATION CLIMATE
- REQUIRES CONTINUED/EXPANDED COMMITMENT

MUST BE PART OF A "LONG TERM STRATEGY" AND ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT STYLE.

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